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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004162

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS ALL NEAR EAST COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2021

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LE](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TFLE01: TURKISH REACTION TO MIDDLE EAST CRISIS:  
CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE, CLAIMS OF DOUBLE STANDARDS

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Classified by Ambassador Ross Wilson for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an overcharged environment where PKK killings of 16 security forces in the last few days has dovetailed with popular outcry over Israel's actions against Hizballah, Turkish press and public reaction to Middle East developments has been overwhelmingly negative. Media commentary has condemned the Israeli action and fueled popular pressure for a cross-border operation into Iraq to retaliate for recent PKK-caused deaths. Senior GOT officials have tried to take a more nuanced line in official statements, calling for both ceasefire and release of hostages, but the rising death toll -- both in the Middle East and in Turkey as a result of PKK attacks -- is driving enflamed and emotional rhetoric. End Summary.

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MFA Statement; FM Gul Comments  
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¶2. (U) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement July 14 noting that events that began in the Gaza Strip are now threatening the stability of Lebanon. The Ministry called on Israel to "end its military operation at once," while also calling on the other side to "release the kidnapped soldiers immediately." FM Gul echoed the official statement and invited everyone to work rapidly for a cease-fire. Anatolian News Agency quotes Gul on July 14, "There could be a great deal of instability in the region. The first thing that needs to be done is to stop the firing, and then to calmly look for a way out of this."

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PM Erdogan More Emotional  
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¶3. (U) Semi-official Anatolian News Agency reported that PM Erdogan told journalists on July 14 that Lebanon being

punished for the actions of Hizballah is neither comprehensible nor humane. "This is something that is not acceptable within the dimensions of diplomacy. These are steps that virtually destroy the Middle East peace process. A cease-fire needs to be reached immediately, and everyone must think about how to achieve peace through diplomatic means. Israel needs to reconsider its position."

14. (U) On July 16, PM Erdogan continued to call for the UN Security Council to intervene and launch initiatives for a cease-fire in a speech in the eastern city of Artvin. As reported on NTV television news channel, Erdogan said nothing can justify dropping bombs on civilians and mercilessly making a mess of cities. He added that those who reject global peace will sooner or later pay the price by facing global terrorism. Anatolian News Agency later quoted Erdogan as saying Turkey participated in the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative to bring peace to the region and "improve democracy, human rights, rule of law, freedoms and welfare. But, there are some negative developments in the region. So, we have to review our position."

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Overall Reaction Through a PKK Lens  
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15. (C) Following the death of 16 Turkish soldiers in the last several days at the hands of the PKK in southeastern Turkey, the GOT signaled Turkey would adopt much tougher measures against the PKK. FM Gul led an extraordinary meeting of the government's Anti-terror High Council, and the Council of Ministers convened on July 17.

16. (U) Most newspapers on July 18 headline with accusations against the U.S. for what they call a "double standard"

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regarding U.S. opposition to Turkish military operations to fight the PKK in northern Iraq and U.S. support for Israel's right to defend itself. MFA U/S Tuygan, who convoked the Ambassador on July 17, is quoted extensively in mainstream Milliyet newspaper. "Turkish people perceive as a double standard the fact that Israel is shown tolerance while Turkish action in northern Iraq is restrained. This fuels anti-American sentiments. The latest strategic vision document adopted by the U.S. and Turkey has fueled Turkish expectations for action." Columnists on July 18 also raise questions on the shared vision document's points regarding the PKK, with one tabloid headlining, "What Kind of Friendship is This?" Mainstream Hurriyet newspaper on July 18 quoted an anonymous government minister, "Now we have asked both the Iraqi government and the U.S. to meet our demands. Otherwise we will act on our own. If you have any objections, then take a look at those who act on their own." Asked whether he was referring to Israel, the minister replied, "Isn't that clear?"

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